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REPORT ON THE P.N.E.U.
EXPERIMENT
IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Out of print.

By
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Secretary for Education, Gloucestershire.

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REPORT ON THE P.N.E.U. EXPERIMENT IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

By H. W. HOUSEHOLD.

(Secretary for Education, Gloucestershire.)

It was in November, 1916, that Miss Mason's method and its achievements first became known to us. By the following March five Schools in the County had embarked upon the course. One of these failed, but the others (Group 1. below) were so successful, and so enthusiastic, that early in 1918 a number of other Schools (Group 2.) were invited to share the privilege, and later in the Spring yet others (Group 3) By this time twenty-six Schools, four of which were Infants' Schools, were working under the Scheme. These Schools are indicated below by letters of the alphabet. The nature of the organisation, the number of children and teachers, and character of the district in which the School is situated, are shown in each case:—

GROUP I.		School.	Numbers.	Staff.	Character of Neighbourhood.
A.	C. of E.	G. & I.	112	4	Partly rural, partly industrial
B.	C. of E.	G.	115	4	Cotswold Town.
C.	C.	G.	85	3	Partly rural, partly industrial.
D.	C.	G.	123	3	Urban (Industrial).
GROUP II.					
E.	C. of E.	M. & I.	125	4	Rural.
F.	C. of E.	M. & I.	280	9	Partly rural, partly industrial.
G.	C.	M.	177	5	Partly rural, partly industrial.
H.	C. of E.	B.	132	4	Cotswold Town.
I.	C.	B.	295	8	Cotswold Town.
K.	C. of E.	M.	178	5	Mining.
L.	C. of E.	I.	107	4	Mining.
M.	C.	G.	264	7	Urban (Industrial).
N.	C.	B.	268	7	Urban (Industrial).
O.	C. of E.	M. & I.	48	2	Rural.
P.	C.	B.	165	7	Urban (Industrial).
Q.	C.	M. & I.	241	10	Urban (Industrial).
R.	C.	M.	117	3	Rural.
S.	C.	I.	50	2	Rural.
GROUP III.					
T.	C.	B.	180	5	Mining.
U.	C.	G.	164	5	Mining.
V.	C.	I.	167	5	Mining.
W.	C.	M.	472	10	Mining.
X.	C.	M.	165	8	Mining. (Higher Elementary).
Y.	C.	M.	170	5	Mining.
Z.	C.	I.	122	4	Mining.
AA.	C.	G.	155	6	Urban (Industrial).
		C.	...	...	Council.
		C. of E.	...	...	Church of England.
		B.	...	...	Boys'.
		G.	...	...	Girls'.
		I.	...	...	Infants'.
		M.	...	...	Mixed.

To each of these Schools the following circular letter was recently addressed:—

County Education Office,
Shire Hall, Gloucester,
4th January, 1919.

Dear Sir (or Madam),

Now that Miss Mason's Scheme has been working for some time in more than a score of Schools, I am anxious to be able to tell the Education Committee what measure of success is attending it. Owing to the War conditions I have not been able to visit the Schools as I should have liked to do, but even if I had visited them I should not have felt able—nor should I have been the proper person—to estimate the results of the Scheme.

You and your staff, and perhaps some of your children, can do it with much surer touch; and I should be very grateful if each School would let me have reports and memoranda from any of those who are teaching or are being taught, who feel that they have anything that they would like to say, no matter how trifling it may seem. I shall make it my business to digest the heap of material which I hope will flow in upon me, and in return I may be able to give back something to the Schools.

Needless to say, I want to know just what you are all really thinking. If you do not accept Miss Mason's aims, or like her methods, or approve her choice of books, I should like to know it. If you are in complete sympathy then I should like to have illustrations of the results that are being attained.

In the December number of the "Parents' Review" there is a most suggestive article on Education and Kultur by E.K.—initials behind which is no doubt concealed the name of Miss Kitching, Miss Mason's friend and Secretary—which will point lines of thought and help to weigh up achievement.

I hope that nobody will make a burden of what I ask. Much or little, I shall be grateful for what you send. It may be that in some cases the moment has not come for saying anything. It will come later. Where it has come there will be things to say, and those are the things that I should like to hear.

In any report that I may frame on your material it would probably be the general wish that individual Schools should remain anonymous.

I am, Yours truly,
(Signed) H. W. HOUSEHOLD,
Secretary.

The admirable reports which have been sent in are too long to be printed in full. In summarising their contents it has seemed best to take in sequence the various points brought out by the many writers, and to illustrate the argument by extracts. The extracts have sometimes been shortened by the omission (always indicated) of a few words or sentences, but nothing material has been left out in any passage quoted. The compiler has studied to present every point of view and line of argument with fairness.

Perhaps it was rather early to ask for such reports. The Schools had been working under almost every possible disadvantage. Many were understaffed; the influenza epidemic had played havoc with the attendance and the work; books came late from the publishers, and in many cases did not come at all. There was much to discourage, and little to hearten, save the cheering light which at times shone through the clouds of difficulty from the far horizon, where a new sun was rising with promise of a cloudless noon. Eleven of the Schools have marked its rising, and await with sure confidence the vision of its meridian glory. The teachers of three, "lost leaders" of whom better things were hoped, have fallen by the way, stumbling on rocks of their own imagining, and have sought leave to go back again to the old familiar darkness. They have gone. They could not see the light, and said stoutly it was not there. Three have not felt able to send in any report but their success can hardly be doubted. Of the rest most have beheld elusive gleams, and press forward bravely and hopefully, though not without mistakes and trials and disappointments.

The difficulties encountered are real. That they are often a result of misunderstanding, and so self-created, rather adds to than diminishes their power to obstruct. Let us look at them through the eyes of those who have found them, sometimes very dragons, in their path.

Some—among them one of the fallen—feared the terminal examinations. They remembered the annual nightmare of their early teaching days, and said that examinations must lead to cramming. They would not believe that these examinations do not; that revision is not attempted; that the fulness of the syllabus makes it, and is intended to make it, quite impossible; that (greatest of all joys) it is found to be unnecessary. "The old idea of constant revision is rendered impossible," says the Head Master of N., "If I interpret Miss Mason correctly (and he does) she discountenances this repetition as unnecessary and harmful, and certainly I have long since discovered that time spent in going over, again and again, work already done is generally wearisome and unprofitable."

Some lack confidence in the children whom they teach. "The Scheme," they say "was never intended for the child in the Elementary School. It was intended for children working at home."

Or, as another, an assistant, writes, "The Scheme would be

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a most excellent one if used in Secondary Schools, or in Institutions, where the aim is to turn out **students**, thoroughly well-learned in the things of ancient days. . . . Practically all our pupils have to become **workers** at an early age. . . . It is folly to waste the short and precious school-days in so much book learning, when the child's chief need is a practical knowledge of how to meet the difficulties of everyday life. Students are seldom practical people, and the British Empire of the future needs workers rather than bookworms."

"Alas! alas! that any teacher should so write. Must not the workers be thinkers too? Must they not learn the great lessons of the ages—the experience of the past with its successes and its failures, the wisdom of the wise and the folly of the foolish—if they are to steer the ship of state by safe ways to the harbour of well-being and contentment, and not end disastrously upon the rocks?"

"The 'British Museum' and 'Plutarch's Lives,' " says another, "are difficult for younger children. The scenes and lives of people that approach more nearly to their own time would seem to be of a more practical value. . . . The average person knows nothing of these people and can be expected to care little about unearthing the dim and distant past."

The same note occurs in other reports. Sometimes it sounds more harshly still. "It is utterly immaterial to me," says one, "what the Babylonians wore, or what the Assyrians built. . . . History should deal chiefly with the past century." Shall we not think with pity of what those who write thus have themselves missed somewhere in the days of their youth? Imagination—the gracious influence that does all the gilding of our life, and is also the very source of the great conceptions that lead to material success and social well-being—imagination in them has atrophied and come to nought.

"The study of 'Plutarch's Lives,' " says another, "seems suitable only for riper minds. If the Lives as a whole were studied the scholars might get an idea of the foundation of the Roman and Grecian Empires." But he has missed the whole purpose of the study, which is by no means to give them "an idea of the foundation of the Roman and Grecian Empires," but something very different. Old Montaigne* shall tell him what it is.

* "Of the institution and education of children." Essays, Book I., Chap. xxv.

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"He (the teacher) shall by the help of Histories inform himself of the worthiest minds that were in the best ages. It is a frivolous study if a man list, but of invaluable worth to such as can make use of it. . . . What profit shall he not reap touching this point, reading the lives of our Plutarch? Always conditioned the master bethink himself whereto his charge tendeth, and that he imprint not so much in his scholar's mind the date of the ruin of Carthage, as the manners of Hannibal and Scipio, nor so much where Marcellus died, as because he was unworthy of his devoir he died there; that he teach him not so much to know Histories, as to judge of them. . . . To some kind of men it is a mere grammatical study, but to others a perfect anatomy of Philosophy, by means whereof the secretest part of our nature is searched into."

It is all plain enough to those whose eyes are open. Let us hear another teacher, the Head Master of Q. There is no disguising that the children find Plutarch difficult, but they are meant to find him difficult. The joy comes when the difficulties are mastered, and they are being mastered at Q.

"Among the subjects new to teachers and scholars," we are told, "the study of 'Citizenship' through Plutarch's Lives seems to have presented difficulty. In some instances this is due to the difficult sentences of the translation. . . . This difficulty has been overcome to a certain extent by greater acquaintance with the style of the writing; but more so, however, by a recognition of two things. First, that to explain the meaning of the words destroys interest in the story and annoys the child. Second, that in many instances it is unnecessary. Although a child's dictionary knowledge of the meaning of words is lacking, it does not follow that the meaning of a sentence or paragraph is unknown to him. . . . Neither is the correct employment of the words beyond him in writing or narrating."

"Two examples of this power to 'sense' the meaning were observed last term. There is a particular boy in Form IIB. who has not hitherto been looked upon as possessing high intelligence. Classified by age he ought to be two forms higher. Last term in taking the story of Romulus and Remus I found that in power of narrating and degree of understanding (that is of 'sensing' a paragraph and either translating into his vocabulary, which was apt, or in using the words read to him) he stood above the others, and also above the majority in the next

higher form. . . . In passing, I may say that his interest in other subjects seems to have increased and his condition is improved.*

"The further example of this power to grasp the meaning of a writer without being able to define the words in detail, was afforded by 'The Talisman.' In two forms the teachers set out with the purpose of taking it chapter by chapter, dwelling on the explanation of the meaning of words. The result was disappointing. Mechanical progress was slow and laboured. Interest in the story was killed. Written tests showed little grasp of the story, and in spite of such careful digging in the sentences the gold remained hidden. I suggested letting the children read silently—testing by narration—and then written tests; and then only in those parts where the incident and description were likely to appeal. Only such explanation was given as was asked for by the children, or which was likely to bring into greater clearness some necessary point. The results were much better. The children imagined the characters and pictured the incidents for themselves. The Third Crusade, its incidents and actors, became something more than a chapter in Arnold Forster's History. Written tests showed that the author had been followed, and in reproducing his story the children reproduced his words."

"The children very much appreciated the story of Romulus and Remus," says an uncertificated assistant in the same School, "and seem to have set out with the determination to enjoy the life story of Lycurgus. It is this book—'Plutarch's Lives'—and the History of Rome which are the subjects of interesting compositions." For this young teacher (she is only 21) has found that "Narration has greatly improved their English. The children have a larger vocabulary. They have a clearer way of expressing themselves, and are not afraid of speaking in front of the other scholars. . . . Then again there are so many subjects for Composition and the Compositions have certainly improved; they are not as scrappy as they used to be. The subjects of their essays are more interesting."

* NOTE.—The Head Master of N. remarks that "the benefits on the whole are undeniable, and in some individual instances quite surprising. We have found that some boys, who formerly were inattentive and forgetful, have become interested, industrious and intelligent in their outlook. I would give first place to the increased interest taken by the classes in their lessons. To secure this and its consequent attention is an achievement, and the best proof of the mental training afforded."

"It is wonderful," says the Head Mistress of C., "how the expression in written work has improved, and what quantities will be written . . . and what an amount of information is gathered and remembered, and long remembered too."

There is the answer to that examination bogey. Let the teachers and the children lay it. There is no need of other words than theirs.

An Assistant who teaches the eight-year-olds in M. writes, "Miss Mason's Scheme is at present one of great surprises. We did not take any examination at the end of the Summer Term, and many sighs were uttered and great dread felt when we heard we were taking the Christmas Examination. The feelings of utter helplessness and chaos grew worse as the dreaded Monday morning came. There was no relief when the questions came, many of which were on the first lessons of the term. The teacher stood before the class and gave out the first examination, a history question on the very first story told in the last week of August.

"For a moment or two there was a blank. Then one by one the children pulled themselves together, and gathered up from the backs of their memories with most wonderful results. Hardly a tiny detail was missing by the time they had finished. After the first plunge the teacher breathed, and each examination was waited for with greater and greater serenity."

The teacher of the seven-year-olds in the same school says:—"Several times during the term I felt very doubtful of the success of the Scheme, as often the work seemed far beyond the capacity of the children, but the examination proved that my doubts were groundless. They attacked the examination well, and one of the most striking results was the way the children corrected their own English when they knew I was writing down their exact answers."

"We did not think that they could do it" is the note of many reports.

The children themselves like the examinations. "In spite of all the drawbacks of the last term the children would have been keenly disappointed if the examination had not been held," writes the Head Master of G. In some schools it was noted that the attendance was exceptionally good during the examination week. Nobody would willingly miss the papers.

Marking examination papers in large numbers is a trying task, but "marking the papers written by the scholars this term was exceedingly interesting work," says an Assistant in

W., whose class must number nearly fifty children. But let us go back to the doubtful ones again. Their hesitations and objections are really very useful and may enable us to help them. Their identity is hidden and the pen, like the Surgeon's knife, may have a kindly purpose, when by probing it brings harmful growths to light.

"I think that a far better selection of reading books might be made," says one of those who have abandoned the scheme; "Children of 12 and 13 do not enjoy Scott or Shakespeare. They find them too difficult." Let us see what others have to say of Scott and Shakespeare.

"What has surprised us most," says the Head Master of N, "is the ready way boys absorb information and become interested in literature, which we have hitherto considered outside the scope of primary school-teaching. A year ago I could not have believed boys would read Lytton's 'Harold,' Kingsley's 'Hereward,' and Scott's 'Talisman,' with a real pleasure and zest, or would study with understanding and delight Shakespeare's 'Macbeth,' 'King John,' and 'Richard II'; but experience has shown we had underrated the abilities and tastes of the lads we should have known better."

"The Talisman is very hard-worded, but it is ever so interesting," says a girl of twelve in M.

Shakespeare has proved himself a triumphant and wholly glorious success in many of the Schools. "We were sorry the play of King John did not come in time for us to be able to read it—we simply enjoyed Macbeth," says another girl of twelve in M.

"There always seems joy when Shakespeare is announced," says the Head Mistress of C, and she adds that "many girls have bought a complete copy of Shakespeare's Works."

The writer has himself seen and felt the joy of the children in acting some of the great scenes from the plays, scenes which in one case that he recalls (it was at D.) they had not touched for more than three months. By their own desire they had harked back to the work of the previous term. Of course to get this spirit and this success needs good teaching. "In beginning this Scheme in a School," writes the Head Mistress of A., "the teacher must live in her class. She must pass in and out among the girls while they are reading and see that nothing is passed over that is not understood; read the context with the child, take the hard word out, and the child will herself find out the meaning of it by seeing its use in the sentence. I find

now that there is no need to go to the girls, they come out to me." Elsewhere she says, "I find Miss Mason's scheme just what we needed. The variety of subjects, which are so cleverly arranged that they blend into one whole, charms the children. They love to read and they love to be read to. . . . I find too that the children are beginning to appreciate language. I was reading to them one day one of the old Norse legends; the whole class of over thirty girls was wrapped in attention, when one of them remarked in a pause in the reading, 'Isn't that like poetry?'"

An Uncertificated Assistant in G. who takes Form 1A. says "The work is undoubtedly extremely interesting both for teacher and for scholar. It adds an entirely new outlook to the average child in the Elementary School. . . . It makes even small children realise that there are thousands of good books which they had never heard of, and it makes them wish that they *could* read them. . . .

"The improvement in the children's vocabulary is already marked, and quite little children are slowly acquiring the habit of distinguishing between synonyms because they are so constantly hearing the correct words applied in the different meanings. They also use these words for themselves when writing down their stories and lessons. They are beginning to appreciate beauty of prose and verse. The memory is strengthened considerably."

The Head Master of the same School refers to the influence of the Scheme upon the tone of the School (which is always high). "During the nine months Miss Mason's Scheme has been worked," he says "there is an added delightful stimulus, which I had hardly thought possible among children who already loved their work."

Perhaps then we may dismiss the objection of one of the faint-hearted that "the books are written in a language far above that which the vocabulary of the children will allow them to read with moderate comfort," remarking only that the aim must always be ahead of the achievement, and that the ability of the children to enjoy and profit by the books is far greater than he thinks. The Assistant Mistress, who teaches Form 1B., in M., puts the first point quite plainly. "The choice of books for Standard I. is good," she says, "they are sufficiently beyond

the children to be of real educational value." And where some of the books are felt to be difficult (perhaps too difficult) it is recognised that "when the lower forms have had more practice in the working of the Scheme, no doubt our older forms will be able to grasp these. We cannot expect our girls to grasp the Scheme in its entirety at once." It should be added that the Head Mistress of C., who writes thus, is delighted with the results that have been achieved.

Some teachers do not understand the value of the delightful books on Natural History, and think that they either supplant the natural study of Nature or leave no time for it. The children know better. Child after child writes to say how much they have enjoyed reading about the stars. "As we are walking sometimes and the stars are shining," says a girl of eleven in A., "I tell Mother about the stars and planets and comets. She said she should think astronomy very interesting." That shows what the books are doing. The unbeliever who writes, "More would surely be gained by watching the development of frog spawn to tadpole and frog, than from reading so many pages from a book on the subject at a season when the spawn cannot be obtained," may really take heart. The child will look for the frog spawn, if that has caught his interest, when the time comes round—mercifully not as a member of a class under direction, but as a happy, curious, little soul following up by himself many a quest inspired by the delightful pages. We do not, need not, cannot read about everything just (and only just) at the moment when it reveals itself. The appeal made to the children by the study of "Plant Life," "The Fairyland of Science," "Life and her children," "The Sciences," and other books, the interest which they excite and the activity of mind which they set up, are noticed by several teachers.

A valuable appreciation of the method and its results was received from the Head Master of Q., who has already been quoted at some length at pp. 365 and 366 above. The following passages are interesting and suggestive.

"The subjects seem to be many; yet nearly one half, comprising considerably more than half the bulk of work set in the programmes, is but one subject—Reading.

"Every educated person is indebted for the best part of his powers to Reading. From the very outset of his educational

adventures a child is being trained in the use of this power to read for pleasure and information. Incidentally the attitude of us teachers towards the subject is corrected. The technique of reading had the chief place; and while the reading lesson offered the opportunity to secure clearness of speech, yet that achievement is of less value to the individual than his power to read with purpose. In spite of the appearance on our time-tables of so many reading lessons, whatever fluency and accuracy of vocal interpretation we secured was not accompanied by the more important mental interpretation. . . . Under the scheme Reading throughout has improved, as it is bound to do. And the child in narrating gives better modulation of voice than was ever before secured when it was sought for as a thing apart. . . .

"It is clear that the intellectual interest of the child is aroused, and that teacher and pupil alike have greater pleasure in their common task. It is a common task. Both are engaged in a study of the same subject from the same books. The teacher is no longer to be regarded as the fountain of all knowledge. . . . The spirit of self-help is engendered. The habit of doing for oneself is required from the beginning; and it is evident that if a child is educated on these lines from the age of seven to fourteen it will have the habit of mind which will enable it to achieve rich results in the informative period of its development from fourteen years onward.

This power of self-preparation is already noticeable, and, naturally, in a greater degree in Form IV. And when Continuation Schools are established, such children, trained in this way, should be able to pass into these schools and derive the greatest possible amount of benefit from their continued training.

"A further hope! When children have gone from Elementary to Secondary Schools, it has been observed that they have not readily adjusted themselves to new conditions. This is due, no doubt, in great part to the fact that they are unable to study when left to themselves. The habit of relying on the teacher is strong with them, and when required to delve for themselves they are unable to do so. Although provided with the tools of the student, they know not how to use them. The hope is that this reproach on elementary training will be removed.

"Among those results which are clearly due to P.U.S.

methods is the increased power of concentration; and I think Miss Mason's claim that narration secures concentration may be conceded. Written tests show this. When a lesson was tested by what the books on 'School Methods' called 'rapid, vigorous questioning,' the written tests, even when immediately following, were disappointing. Narration shows the grasp a child has of its reading, and at the same time strengthens its grasp. Its confidence in its possession is confirmed, so that it is not afraid to write or speak afterwards for fear of being wrong. It knows how much it has at its command.

"There appear to me to be two errors into which we may fall in connection with narration. The first lies in the preparation. This preparation is done either by the teacher reading the selected part, or by the child reading it—aloud or silently. Assuming the teacher's reading to be good, that method seems to give better results. Modulation, emphasis, gesture, even attitude of body, help in interpretation. The child's mind can concentrate on what is read. The mechanical difficulty of reading is removed, and there is no break in the flow of thought. But the object is to train in the habit of purposeful reading. To do that with hope of success, there should be an increasing amount of silent preparation, not only as the scholar progresses from form to form, but also from term to term in its forms. . .

"The second danger springs from the fear in the teacher's mind that the prescribed amount of work will not be done each term. This fear tempts one to overdo the personal method of reading, and to rely too much on the best children. Those with weaker powers of understanding do not receive chances (of narrating) in sufficient number either to develop greater powers or to give them confidence and encouragement. More than that, if not continually called upon to take a share, equivalent to their powers, in narrating, the lazy habit of mind, springing from and fostered by reliance on other minds, will grow with them. . . .

"Composition, oral and written, is undoubtedly improved. Narration secures better oral composition, and the improvement in the written work follows. . . . The children write at greater length, and acquaintance with good models is seen in the fuller language and better construction. . . . Finally, the interest in reading is greater. Children borrow the books

for evening reading.* In two cases the parent (mother) wished to read, and it may be so in other instances, without a definite request for their use being made. The 'atmosphere' surrounding the work of the school is different. It is freer; and the freer conditions are not felt by the staff only. Whatever may be the ultimate judgment on the methods and work of the P.U.S., none of us would go back within the narrower limits of the old system with anything but an ill grace."

The Head Master of R. has sent some interesting notes. "The most pleasing of all," he says, "has been the eagerness among the older scholars to narrate, a thing I could never get them to do previously, and, greatly to my astonishment, scholars I thought to be almost hopeless are in many cases the most exact and fluent narrators. Because of the oral work the scholars have enlarged their vocabularies, can express their ideas more exactly, and exercise a greater amount of intelligence in answering problems and questions based upon the work studied.

"The work under Miss Mason's Scheme is going to cause our scholars to think clearly and reason logically. When they leave school they are going to read for themselves, think for themselves, and act for themselves. In this way they will make intelligent citizens. The greatest benefit which I think the scheme will confer upon our pupils is this: they will read sufficient (and will read it intelligently) to make them want to read more, and next to character the greatest benefit a school can confer on a scholar, is to make that scholar love good books, and give him the power to read those books intelligently. The school of the past has not done this. Some children have loved books in spite of the drudgery of school readers, but while most children could read fluently, few understood and could retain the subject matter."

"On one point only in the scheme," says the same master, "am I a little fearful. . . . In the summer term the book set for Standard V. children, 10-13 years of age, was Lytton's 'Harold.' This book fitted in beautifully with the period of history set for study (1066-1189) but few children enjoyed it because, except for about three places, it was not really interesting to the majority of the class. Children generally learn to break the shell of the nut to get the kernel, very slowly. To

* NOTE.—Several teachers comment on this new borrowing of books.

read dozens of pages of description tires them. They want to get on with the story. I want to get my scholars not only to read books but to love them." Well, his doubt is put on record. The experience of others will be his too. The younger children as they come up the school will love these books. Skill and devotion such as his are not going to fail.

"The children do much more work for themselves," says the Head Mistress of C. An uncertificated Assistant in her school who takes form 1B. has also written a most useful report. "Interest," she says, "grows more and more as each term commences. . . . There is scarcely a child who cannot narrate some of the lesson, though at first it is given in rather a disjointed and disconnected way, which in time gives place in most cases to a very complete story.

"Their spelling too, has greatly improved. Whereas in years gone by nothing much was expected of Standards I. and II., now quite difficult words are accurately written.

"The children also have lost much of their old shyness when talking to strangers.

"The written work has improved wonderfully. The little girls have plenty to write about now and are not at a loss as to what to say; rather the reverse, they have to stop because the time is up. . . .

"For their Nature Study we read 'The Wood I Know' and Mrs. Fisher's 'Eyes and No Eyes' series, 'Birds of the Air,' 'Insect Life' and 'Plant Life in Field and Garden.' It is wonderful how the children have brightened up and really observe. They come for this lesson now eager to tell what they have noticed on their way to and from school, or when out for a walk, and most of them are anxious for information about something or other they have discovered during the week. . . .

" 'The Child's Garden of Verse' the girls have become quite familiar with and know many of the poems by heart. The fact that many of the children now possess a copy of their own, having chosen it for a Christmas present, speaks for itself.

"Pictures I think all children naturally love, but in these there is fascination in bringing out the detail. The little ones constantly bring pictures which have a connection with those studied as well as with their other lessons.

"Naturally the 'Book of Fairy Tales' is the favourite. I

really believe every child would rather forego a half holiday than lose their tale. They are allowed in turn to take home a spare copy. No child ever forgets when it is her turn for the book, it is carried home with great rejoicings."

This teacher has certainly gone to the very heart of the subject.

"Picture Study," says the Head Master of H., who on some points still has doubts, "is most acceptable. It is rare to see a picture without a child studying it during playtimes and before and after school. We find that the children *do* notice detail; they *do* exercise their powers of imagination; and they *do* attempt sound, logical reasoning." He thinks that "Shakespeare and Scott are too difficult for Standards III. and IV.," and "Interesting and valuable though it is (he doubts) the practicability of including so many branches or aspects of Nature Study." The sun has risen above the horizon, but it is not yet high noon. The fuller light will come, but he is a sound and cautious teacher, and he will not say that he sees when he does not.

In the mining district there are difficulties. "Many of the children," says the Head Mistress of Z., "come from homes where the Forest dialect is more often spoken than English. These need a rather liberal and repeated explanation of unusual words or phrases. . . . Necessarily our progress is slow."

The Head Master of Y. has the same difficulty. "The parents, brothers and sisters," he says, "although not illiterate, possess but a dreadfully limited vocabulary; indeed most of their conversation is carried on in the Forest vernacular, which does not lend itself in the least to poetic expression, or pretty flights of imagination, neither does it assist in the interpretation of even comparatively easy English. Our children cannot comprehend the meaning of any but the simplest words. Consequently we have to paraphrase liberally. . . . which does not appear to coincide with Miss Mason's ideas. When the stories are thus simplified. . . . they are thoroughly enjoyed, and as a rule very well memorised. . . .

"Picture Study is producing good results in training the observation."

This is all to the good, but he still has doubts. "There appears," he says, "to be little that is really new in the

Scheme," which means that the sun has not yet broken through the clouds, and he thinks that "the usual disabilities under which elementary teachers work—larger classes, extreme diversities of intellect, and the apathetic attitude of many of the parents towards education," demand a large allowance.

One must not be afraid of crudeness or of many blunders in the first efforts at written expression. "The chief objection some teachers seem to have about the method," says the Head Mistress of B., "is that the child's work is not perfect, they like to see a little done and done perfectly, and thus they would sacrifice everything for accuracy and show. . . . I feel convinced that no teacher will welcome the method until she is satisfied to accept imperfect work (but the child's best) and be content to get gradual improvement.

This is quite true of course, and we have here the error which is especially characteristic of the elementary School, with its numbing experience of "payment by results." Like most errors it is a weed of luxuriant growth, very difficult to eradicate when once established. "The Suggestions for the consideration of Teachers," issued by the Board of Education, still battle with it. "The teaching of composition, like that of any other subject," says Paragraph 25, "consists, not in shielding a child from every danger of mistake, but in enabling him gradually to correct his errors for himself."

One delightful consequence of the method still remains to be noticed. "It is surprising," says the teacher of Form IB., in M., "how the children will link up one subject with another, and it is usually a sensible connection. . . . The children have done it before, but it seems to me that by Miss Mason's Scheme they are helped more efficiently." The teacher of Form III. in the same School also brings out this feature. "The girls," she says, "are certainly learning to connect and apply the information which they get from the books, and have at times expressed surprise that one book throws light on the subject matter of a different book. Here are the beginnings of an appreciation of wide reading which broadens one's outlook on life."

"Their curiosity and interest is always aroused when they read in one book a name or a fact which is connected with something which they have read in another book, and as the books

chosen deal with the same period in history, this often happens," is how the teacher of Form IIA. in Q. puts the same fact, which, of course has provoked comment in several other schools.

The joy of recognition is great. The supply of books in the Elementary School is usually so meagre that it is almost unknown to the children. Under its thrilling stimulating influence the mind grows fast.

Some of us had guessed perhaps what the children think of the books we usually give them. Let a girl of twelve in M. tell us what she thinks of the new and the old.

"They (the new books) are the most interesting books," she says, "I have ever read in school. Ever so many grown-up people would like the chance of having these books to read. Before we had these we had to read the same old, old lot again and again." Is there not a reproach to us there that should make us mend our ways? It has been said, with justice, that, "it is not well to teach our democracy to read unless we also teach it to think."

We may succeed in teaching it to read on the worse than parsimonious allowance of half-a-crown per child per year for books, but we shall certainly never teach it to think for the money. By our niggardliness we make it impossible really to educate. "At last," says the teacher of Form III. in M.—"At last we have what we have always wanted—books and more books." Of course they cost money. The Scheme cannot be worked cheaply. Perhaps one day the Board of Education may think fit to investigate the expenditure upon books, and fix some minimum sum per child below which it shall not fall. But the books must be chosen wisely or much of their value is lost. Miss Mason does for the teachers what very many teachers are as yet unable to do for themselves. Her method is simple like most great methods, but simple as it is we have all missed it, every syllabus-maker of us. Learned and unlearned must share the same reproach.

Further particulars and pamphlets may be had from the General Secretary, P.N.E.U. Office, 26, Victoria Street, S.W. Correspondence connected with the propaganda of the movement is carried on through the P.N.E.U. Office. The Secretary (and the Committee) are prepared to organize work in any district in the way of visits, consultations by letter, arrangements for meetings, etc.

OUR 'LIBERAL EDUCATION FOR ALL'
MOVEMENT.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL.

REPORT OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE FOR 1917-18.

Extract from Prefatory Note.

IN November 1916 there reached the Education Office from the Parents' National Educational Union three pamphlets descriptive of a scheme of education, founded upon that which had been built up by Miss Charlotte Mason at Ambleside for her Students at the House of Education, and followed by them in home and school, as parents or as teachers, and also by many of the great army of untrained governesses who joined the Union for the sake of its guidance and the standard which its syllabuses and examinations give. One of the pamphlets described the working of this scheme of education by the Staff of the Elementary School in a mining village in Yorkshire. The covering letter claimed that the experiment showed "that it is possible to give to the children of the working classes such an education *in English*, as should make them patriotic and large-minded citizens, with resources for their own leisure and pleasure; that it is possible, in short, to send out persons who having read a good deal, should not readily be carried away by fallacious arguments."

The claim is a large one, but the experience of schools which have worked under the scheme certainly goes far to justify it.

It is Miss Mason's conviction that in the Elementary Schools we underestimate the child's capacity and set our aim too low. She criticises our "plausible and pleasant ways of picturing, eliciting, demonstrating, illustrating, summarising, in fact doing all those things for children, which they are born with the potency to do for themselves"; and she adds that, if we will have courage, "we shall be surprised . . . at the amount of intellectual strong meat almost any child will take at a meal

and digest at his leisure"; and tells us that "teaching and tale, however lucid or fascinating, effect nothing until self-activity be set up, that is, *self-education* is the only possible education; the rest is the mere veneer laid on the surface of a child's nature."

It is not unjust to say that in the Elementary School we have too often been laying a mere veneer. Self-activity, self-education may enter (it is not always that they do) when the children are in the garden, the workshop or the cookery-room, or are engaged upon arithmetic, mensuration or drawing; but save in connection with the garden it is only rarely that they are allowed their proper place in the English teaching, either in reading or in writing. It is but seldom that self-expression is even aimed at. Children of the middle classes have abundant opportunity for it both at home and at school. But to the child from the cottage the home can rarely furnish either stimulus or occasion. And at school he is only one of perhaps 40 or 50 in a class, and the teacher is very apt to do most of the talking. That is a temptation which besets every teacher everywhere, and the larger the class the harder it is to resist. The "chalk and talk" of Mr. Holmes's phrase are the natural refuge of the overburdened. But of course they are fatal to the child's chance of mental development.

Add that the books in use in the Elementary School are usually of a distinctly inferior type, that they are neither so planned nor so used as to exact steady intellectual effort, and that composition, which (whether oral or written) is the foundation of self-expression, often (though happily no longer so often as a few years ago) amounts to little more than the reproduction of the teacher's materials, in the teacher's order, and almost in the teacher's words; and it becomes plain that it is not possible under such conditions to set up self-activity or to do more than lay a mere veneer.

For "an education in English" two things are necessary---good books and intellectual effort on the part of the individual child. The child must thoroughly master the book and its story or argument, and be able to state consecutively and in well chosen language what that story or argument is. Here is the foundation of Miss Mason's method. The books in use are

relatively numerous and expensive (to equip a school costs about 5/- per child) and they are guaranteed by the names of their authors. Self-expression begins with the first sentence read aloud to the youngest child. Its substance is immediately reproduced before the next sentence is read. Later on a paragraph, a page or a chapter is read before the reproduction is exacted, but it always follows; and at the end of each term an examination gathers up the whole of the term's work. There is no escape from close attention. Memory, the power of analysis, of selection, of ordered thought, and of ordered expression, are all called into play, and intellectual development proceeds apace attended by a radiant enjoyment on the part of the children in work, which reveals and creates power through self-activity.

The claims of the scheme were laid before the Chairman, and his permission was obtained to introduce it experimentally into a small number of schools. For a year it has been working in the following:—Cirencester, Watermoor Girls' C. of E., Cam Girls' C. of E., Painswick Girls' Council, Stroud, Badbrook Girls' Council.

In these schools gratifying progress is being made, and results are being obtained which amply justify the claims that are made for the scheme. The gain in interest and intelligence is great; the imagination has been stirred; the vocabulary has been enriched in a very striking way; and the power of expression has developed to an extent that can best be realised if it is said that children are now writing three or four rapid vigorous pages, stamped with their own individuality, where a year ago they would scarcely have written one, and that one without a trace of facility, vigour or self-expression.

To these four schools seventeen more have recently been added, namely:—Almondsbury, Patchway C. of E., Cainscross C. of E., Cirencester Boys' Council, Cirencester Boys' Endowed C. of E., Chalford Hill Council, East Dean, Cinderford Higher Elementary, East Dean, Double View Council, East Dean, Bilson Council, Boys and Girls, East Dean, St. White's Council, East Dean, Trinity C. of E., Kingswood, Hanham Road Girls' Council, Kingswood, High Street Boys' Council, Quenington C. of E., Stroud, Church Street Council, Stroud, Uplands Council, Wollaston Council.

The syllabuses prepared by Miss Mason for the Parents' Union School and the lists of books selected ensure, what the Union aims at, a liberal education. A standard syllabus, a list of books (although there is a variety of alternatives), and a terminal examination on papers set by Miss Mason might be thought to involve such a surrender of individuality and initiative on the part of the teachers as would alienate their sympathy. It can only be said that this is not in fact the result. It is not necessary here to consider in detail why it is so. Curiously nothing has given more satisfaction to children and teachers than the week of real Examination.

The standard syllabus opens out many interesting possibilities. Where, as at Cinderford, the programmes of the P.U.S. have obtained entrance to what is practically a Secondary School, fed by a group of Elementary Schools around it, a child will follow from its earliest school days up to the age of matriculation a scheme of work planned as a whole by one whose name will assuredly go down to posterity in company with those of the famous educational reformers.

Miss Parish, the Secretary of the Union, has visited all the teachers and has explained and illustrated the methods of the scheme. Her visits have been most fruitful and have given great pleasure. No charge whatever has been made in respect of the expense of these visits or of the terminal syllabuses and other printed matter that has been supplied.

It is impossible not to form the highest hopes of the ultimate fruit of the scheme, when it shall have been at work for four or five years, and children are coming up to the top of the school who were entered to it at the bottom. These children will have learned to use and to love good books, and it would have been a tragedy if books had not been ready to their hands. Happily they will be there, and they will set the crown upon that "liberal education for all" which is the motto of Miss Mason's scheme. The books will come from the Rural Libraries in connection with the schools, which the far-seeing beneficence of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees has enabled the Education Committee to call into existence, and which will bring light and joy to many a village home.